Central Peace Regional Emergency Management Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 21, 2024
6:30 p.m.
Council Chambers
Birch Hills County

PRESENT: Denay Bjornson, Birch Hills County
Larry Davidson, Birch Hills County
Michael Coy, Birch Hills County
Tom Morgan, Birch Hills County
Dianne Nellis, MD of Spirit River
Nick van Rootselaar, MD of Spirit River
Wayne Meyer, Town of Spirit River
Brenda Stanich, Town of Spirit River
Cary Merritt, Saddle Hills County *Joined electronically*
Monica Randell, Saddle Hills County *Joined electronically*
Brice Daly, Saddle Hills County
Peter Thomas, Village of Rycroft
Jo Chelick, Village of Rycroft
Alan Stebbing, AEMA
Sachin Bagade, Alberta Health Services *Joined electronically*
Shelley Abram, ATCO
Shauna Clark-Marlow, ATCO
Rick Hoddinott, Alberta Forestry & Parks
Rob Galon, Alberta Forestry & Parks
Brian Kroes, Central Peace Fire and Rescue
Lorne Johnson, EPA
Debi Cardwell, Victim Services
Adam Stokes, RCMP
Emily Bolch, Recording Secretary

ALSO PRESENT: N/A

1. CALL TO ORDER:

1.1 Call to Order
Meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m.

2. AGENDA:

2.a. Adoption of Agenda
MOVED by Denay Bjornson
That the agenda for the March 21, 2024 Central Peace Regional Emergency Management Committee Meeting be adopted as amended with the addition of 6. Emergency Preparedness Week.

Carried Unanimously

3. ADOPTION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES:

3.a. Minutes of the November 23, 2023 CPREM Committee Meeting
MOVED by Brenda Stanich
That the minutes of the November 23, 2023 Central Peace Regional Emergency Management Committee Meeting be adopted as presented.

Carried Unanimously

4. ADMINISTRATION

4.a. Regional Emergency Management Plan Updates

Changed format of agenda a little bit. Housekeeping changes only to the plan, such as staff and equipment. Emily is working directly with DEMS on updates.

4.b. Municipal Emergency Management roles

There are (5) DEMS within CP-REM. Brice asked that all DEMS name who their Deputy DEM is, and that there can be one or more Deputy DEMS. Training for Deputy DEMS includes the DEM course and ICS 300.

Brice Daly discussed the role of an Information Officer during a disaster, and that we do already have coverage and backups for that position within CP-REM.

4.c. Large Animal Emergency Support Plan (LAESP)

One small amendment has been made to the plan. AFAC had 18 livestock trailers pre-positioned throughout Alberta. We are waiting to see what is going to become of the trailers now that AFAC has folded. The closest resource in our area is at the County of Grande Prairie's La Glace fire station. Their La Glace firefighters have formal training for livestock emergencies, such as highway traffic incidents involving livestock, or if horses fall through the ice in a dugout, etc. Brice reviewed how this resource can be accessed through calling the County of Grande Prairie Fire Service directly, or through 9-1-1. A mutual aid agreement is in place for these services and resources.

4.d. 2024 Hazard Season Outlook (March 5 presentation)

This was an online briefing hosted by AEMA. A link is available to view a recording of the presentation. The 2024 fire season is expected to be similar to the 2023 fire season, but with even less moisture, as we are looking at drought conditions in many areas. Many of Alberta's river basins are well below average levels. Even Calgary is implementing a drought plan, curtailing water usage and encouraging residents to utilize rain barrels for lawn watering, among other measures. Saddle Hills County is working on a drought plan as well. Raw water levels in our reservoirs are well below average for the month of March.

5. Pre-Hazard Season Review

5.a. Plan Activation

Review of pre-hazard season. Brice explained that rather than organizing a formal tabletop exercise that he will talk through a similar scenario as part of this meeting.

The first aspect is plan-activation. Activation can begin as local activation for something such as wildfire or water outages and may include evacuation alerts. Brice elaborated on this with the following scenario:

One municipality has a fire, their volunteers have been working for several days, and they require mutual aid. If two or more CPREM partners face a similar crisis, or require common resources, a regional response would be in order. A regional EOC would avoid duplication of efforts. Local resources, such as RCMP members are limited and would be unable to staff multiple EOC's.

Brice discussed authorized users; currently there are (4) authorized users within CP-REM, (3) in Saddle Hills County and (1) in the Town of Spirit River.

5.b. Regional vs Local Activation

Brice continued the scenario by reviewing who can activate the plan, and what happens if it's after hours or on a weekend.

The DEM can activate the plan. Brice asked if staff knew how to activate the plan and who they should talk to. He added that 9-1-1 fire dispatch has our DEM contacts and could call for the CPREM plan to be activated on behalf of one of our fire departments, if requested.

5.c. Public Alerting (initial & updates)

- Alert Ready

Emergencies only, not for everyday announcements.

- Voyent Alert App

A challenge of using this platform is that people must sign up for the service Brian Kroes said that the MD of Spirit River has approximately 300 users, but they have purchased licences for 2500 users. Discussed the importance of using multiple platforms, such as social media, websites, Voyent Alert app, email lists, etc. Voyent Alert is useful for messaging about fire bans, water restrictions, etc. Birch Hills County has activated Voyent Alert and will be conducting an advertising campaign through such methods as direct mail-outs.

- CP-REM website, social media platforms

Monica Randell has Access to CP-REM social media, can send out to all platforms at the same time. So far only Monica has access to all, so backup might be a good idea. Email Monica if you want anything added to CP-REM platforms.

5.d. <u>State of Local Emergency (S.O.L.E.)</u>

Brice reviewed how CP-REM is structured. It is a regional partnership, and for the purposes of emergency management we are one organization.

All (5) municipalities have identical by-laws. A S.O.L.E. can be declared with as few as (2) elected officials, and they don't have to be from the same municipality nor from the affected municipality. The benefit of this is that someone is always available. Brice reviewed the criteria for declaring a S.O.L.E.: imminent threat affecting human life, or major property damage.

Under a S.O.L.E., municipalities are protected from being sued, as long as the S.O.L.E. was used for correct purpose.

A S.O.L.E. gives us broad powers, allowing us to order evacuations, and to leverage some of the resources and processes that we don't have direct access to. It provides greater certainty than we would normally have using the general powers under MGA.

A S.O.L.E. is in force for (7) days but can be extended on day 5 or 6 for another (7) days. It can be terminated sooner or can be allowed to expire after the (7) days are up. The Minister also has the power to end a S.O.L.E.

Discussed examples and current S.O.L.E. in the MD of Opportunity.

Brice reviewed the difference between a S.O.L.E. and a State of Agriculture Disaster, and the benefits of declaring a State of Agriculture Disaster, such as getting attention of the public and the government. Alberta Agriculture will recognize that as well. Brice clarified that Crop failure and drought not covered under DRP, as there may be insurance or other forms of relief available for special situations.

Larry Davidson asked about municipal fire response in the Forest Protection Area (FPA). Rob Galon and Rick Hoddinott clarified that wildland fires are forestry's responsibility, but structures within the FPA are the municipality's responsibility. They expanded that municipalities often arrive first on scene wo wildland fires due to proximity, but that those responses are recoverable expenses from Forestry.

Larry asked about the 4-person helitack (HAC) crews. There are (5) within the Grande Prairie Forest Protection Area, as well as an 8-person base crew out of Sturgeon Lake, that can be expanded as needed. They also have a 20-person unit crew (ground crew) in the area.

Discussed Wildfire control and Mutual Aid agreements, the content of which lays out which jurisdiction is responsible for what.

Forestry can help with wildland fires outside FPA provided they have the resources available.

Brenda Stanich inquired if all municipalities saw the Mutual Aid Fire Control Plan. Rick answered yes, sent out to all municipalities and he recently reached out to update contacts. The agreement exists even if you don't have document in your possession.

An IR scan is planned to assess the fires from last year, possibly by drone or aircraft, for the Boone Lake Complex, South Cecil, Birch Hills Colony fire. Brice asked if snow needs to be gone first. Rick confirmed that all the snow must be gone before they can do the IR scan.
Brice asked Rick to clarify who is responsible for a response in situations where a fire starts in the FPA and burns into non-FPA forest. Rick explained that operations must be conducted with continuity as the plan won't be effective if they have to stop at a line, so they would carry on.

Discussed evacuations for populated areas in FPA. The municipality is responsible to notify residents who need to evacuate. Alberta Forestry would contact Brice or other protective services manager, discuss what will happen in next hours and days to make appropriate decisions for evacuations. Time is a more relevant factor than distance, as winds change timelines. Imperative that communication happen sooner than later.

Larry inquired what would happen if a resident within an evacuation order zone refuses to leave.
Alan Stebbing explained that under a S.O.L.E., an evacuation order is legally enforceable, but that it is more nuanced than that and asked Adam Stokes to continue.
Adam Stokes explained that the RCMP will only enforce the protection of children and that if adults want to stay and defend their property, the RCMP has little authority to arrest and remove them.

Discussed the challenges of staying to defend in urban interface areas, such as the loss of utilities.
Brice discussed evacuation order examples from within Saddle Hills County in 2023.

Discussed Mutual Aid agreements, such as the CPREM agreement with GPREP, Fairview, or Smoky River Regional EM Agencies.

5.e. <u>Mutual Aid Activation (Regional Agreements, NWAB Resource Agreement)</u>
(35) municipalities have signed on. Provides legal means for sharing of resources.

5.f. <u>Emergency Social Services (E.S.S.)</u>
Discussed communication during multi-day events, as well as the importance of recording information about those who are evacuated.
If evacuating only a few residents they will probably stay with friends or family.

Brice reviewed the Emergency Social Services (ESS) training that is available. If anyone is interested in attending, they may sign up through Brice or Emily.

5.g. <u>Resource Requests to Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (P.E.C.C.)</u>
P.E.C.C. has comprehensive resource lists so they would know where to start looking for specialised equipment. Formal resource requests can be sent to the P.E.C.C. , and can extend outside of the Province if required. Forestry now has contracts for large pumps.

Denay Bjornson asked about remote registration during an evacuation and how anyone would know if someone re-entered the evacuation area. Brice explained that the system is mainly for accountability, and can only track a person if they update their own location changes, if any.

Brice explained that when an evacuation order is issued that the municipality must use due diligence and provide security for the evacuated area, citing the example of copper wire theft from South Cecil area.

Discussed examples of reasonable requests of residents who want to return to the evacuated area, such as for the purpose of tending to livestock.

6. Training & Preparedness

6.a. Emergency Management Training Matrix (spreadsheet)

Brice explained purpose of the matrix, which is to ensure staff have adequate training. Brice encouraged training for all staff who may be involved in emergencies.

AEMA Training:

Alan advised that virtual DEM course on April 9 has been cancelled.
Larry asked about the requirement of having to take ICS 200 in-person as a pre-requisite for ICS300. Alan acknowledged that that Larry is not the first person to express concern over this, and explained that their policy also requires the instructor to record the ICS 200 course number as part of the process for enrolling in the ICS 300 course. Brice advised that we should be recommending that staff choose in-person option of obtaining ICS 200 if they will be seeking more advanced ICS training in the future.

Mandated (5) month waiting period between ICS 200 and ICS 300 courses, but they can apply for waiver if there is a good reason. A person can count the (5+) months from when a person took ICS 200 online, so could take ICS 300 immediately after completing the in-person ICS 200 course.

Larry asked if there are refresher courses available rather than taking entire courses over again. Alan answered that they are able to teach an ICS "workshop" and encouraged Larry to make a request, but noted that demand for training has been high right into June. Peter Thomas echoed Larry about the practicality of attending training. Larry would like to see a half-day DEM course.

Monica is taking Information Officer course. Advanced course. We could do a workshop focusing on communications.

ESS Training:

Unlike other technical scopes, ESS volunteers can be trained quickly when needed. We already have many of these roles practically filled, such as the person who looks after a community hall, would be a logical choice to act as a reception center (facility) manager.
Discussed donations management. Alan suggested talking to community futures about them receiving cash donations if applicable, to the emergency and recommended not accepting physical items as donations.
Birch Hills Colony now has commercial kitchen.
Brice asked Sachin Bagade about AHS input on food prep. For evacuees.

NW AHIMT membership NW AHIMT membership

Block training required to be member. Deployable resource. Block training has been around for 6-7 years. Block training is on the AEMA training calendar.

Wildfire Community Preparedness Day (May 4, 2024)

Rick noted that the more that individuals can do with their own property the better off everyone will be about defending that property. Would like to see consistency with that messaging.

May 5-11 Emergency Preparedness Week

Advertised in local media, consistent with Federal EP Week messaging.

7. MITIGATION PROGRAMS

7.b. Alberta FIREBANS.ca

8. Recovery Programs

8.a. DRP/DFA

Saddle Hills County has (1) active DRP from 2020.

Brian Kroes and Brice met with the Pleasant View Lodge. Discussed in context of Silverwood fire. Discussed potential hazards such as not having potable water, extended power outages, and air quality, and the importance of an all-hazards state of readiness, not just wildfires.

Sachin added that Alberta Health Services has a single point of contact for information from municipalities when there is an emergency as a site manager is not always on site.

Brice expanded that this email address could be added to the distribution list for the updates we send out during an emergency.

8.b. MWAP

If costs are large municipalities can apply for non-protection areas.

Rob discussed that insurance companies are denying insurance when assets are too close to wildfires.

Rick expanded that they are working on information strategy with insurance companies of Canada.

Brice asked about fighting fire at night. Rob answered that they have (2) medium helicopters with night vision. Depending on conditions it can be more effective to fight fire at night. Some of the challenges of this are having to move slower with a greater level of awareness. They used to do a lot of nighttime firefighting but got away from it until recently.

Rob discussed using drones for night operations. Send crews to spots on the outskirts, not in the middle of the fires. Best use of this strategy is near communities. Brice asked if nighttime operations require (2) crews. Rob answered that there are logistical factors to consider, such as providing food 24 hours/day, as well as safety and dispatch.

Capability would have been handy to have in some applications last year such as around Edson.

Larry asked about interprovincial and international crews being brought in this year. Rob answered that crews were not readily available last year and that air crews and aircraft to move people were a limiting factor.

9. PARTNER AGENCY UPDATES

10.a AEMA

Alan said that they have been able to increase capacity for field officers.

Involved with wildland urban interface side with Alberta Forestry. There are (2) provincial teams, (1) in Clearwater, (1) in High Level.

AIMS (Alberta Incident Management System) has now been signed off. ICS is an integral part of AIMS.

Technical Search and Rescue:

Alan said they are still very active. There is a Provincial exercise this weekend in Cochrane and (12) members will be participating but noted that they are still active while training is underway.

10.b Other Agencies

Alberta Forestry and Parks:

Rick thanked the volunteer fire departments for their Mutual Aid with the Birch Hills Colony and Blueberry Mountain fires.

2024-2027 Mutual Aid Fire Control plans are underway and will be emailed to respective Chiefs/CAOS for signatures.

Discussed helitack crews, and how they would like to work with fire departments to see equipment being used and make sure they are comfortable with helicopters by conducting a cross training exercise. Let Rick know a date that would work.
Drought levels – 40% of normal precipitation this year, so at a deficit going into Spring. Could be challenging to find water sources for firefighting.

Rob noted that $54 million has been added to program budget. Airtanker groups added, as well as nighttime firefighting. Added (5) 20-person crews. In Grande Prairie they will be up over 150 pay periods. Starting earlier, extending later in the season. Not at capacity where they were in 2015/2016, but close. It has been a challenge finding workers to fill those positions.
Going to put out Junior Forest Ranger program.

Brice asked how easy it is to communicate with Forestry resources using AFRRCS radios.
Rick answered that testing compatibility of radios during the cross-training exercise would be a good opportunity.

Victim Services:
Debi Cardwell said there has been a restructuring, and the program is being taken over and run by Province rather than the RCMP. ESS manager part of job description, but that will change with this transition. Only going to be (4) boards for the Province and the transition will be complete by September.

EAP:
Lorne Johnson noted that April 12 is the usual date for breakup on the Peace River, but that things will change this year with the Site-C dam.

ATCO:
Brought advertising material for outage map. Working on updating outage map with more real-time restoration times. All ATCO staff will take ICS100 to help learn lingo. Many taking further ICS training as well as information officer training, etc.
Brice asked how recovery from last year is going and if there is still lots of infrastructure to replace. Shelley Abram answered that for the most part they are recovered now. They have added fire wrap to most of their poles and the adding of this wrap will be part of new construction as well.

RCMP:
Back up to full complement of (5) members. The new member arrived in early March.

11. ROUND TABLE

11. Town of Spirit River
Brenda noted that their water reservoir is (2) feet lower than it normally is for this time of year. They rely completely on run-off to fill their reservoirs. Working on amending their conserve water plan.

11. Central Peace Fire
Brian said they received a wildland skid unit and purchased new F350 to put it in. The 2023-24 new recruits graduate this Sunday.

11. MD of Spirit River

Dianne Nellis had staff attend session from FRIAA today so they could potentially apply for grant. Thinking about fire guard along Burnt River.

11. Village of Rycroft

Peter said they have started to fill reservoirs, with one entirely filled and working on the next. Spirit River can start filling from the river once Rycroft has got their quota.

11. Birch Hills County

Tom Morgan noted that they have a fire restriction on large fuel loads but are allowing hand-piled piles. Had a wildland fire earlier this year.
Larry said they've ordered some AFRCCS radios and are negotiating with the MD of Greenview to purchase some additional slightly used radios, as they become available. Water looking okay for this year but may have issues next year if there is a drought. Bought a small skid for firefighting.
Public awareness campaign working with school and ag society, and STARS will be in attendance.

11. Saddle Hills County

Cary Merritt had no further updates. Brice noted that they have prepared structure protection (sprinkler) kits and is working on further training for firefighters, before seeding starts. The County is working on a drought plan, which includes looking for additional sources of raw water.

12. NEXT MEETING

November 14, 2024 at Saddle Hills County. Supper at 6:00 p.m., Meeting to start at 6:30 p.m.

14. ADJOURNMENT

14.a. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:17 p.m.